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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBURGEOIS, DBENZE AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/Sudan, Lebanon,
Iraq, Palestinian Territories (12/27)

11. Summary: Syrian papers today reported President Asad's message to Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir conveyed by Deputy Foreign Minister Walid Mouallem on current Arab developments, bilateral relations and coordination for the forthcoming Arab summit scheduled in Khartoum. Mouallem and Mustafa Othman Ismael, the Political Advisor of Sudanese President, exchanged opinions on the Sudanese initiatives for boosting Arab solidarity.

On Lebanon, papers reported current Lebanese contacts to hold a plenary session at the Lebanese Prime Ministry that includes ministers of Hizbollah and the Amal Movement, and featured statements by Lebanese parties rejecting internationalization and isolating Lebanon from Syria.

As for developments in the Palestinian territories, papers reported Sharon's plan to expand settlements around Jerusalem and the Palestinian Authority's intention to complain to Washington, which it is claimed, has already calmed Palestinian fears of expanding Israeli settlements.

The tense situation in Iraq continued to be a major theme in Syrian media, which reported controversy over the results of Iraqi elections and cited more Iraqi calls for a national unity government. Headlines featured a statement by General Peter Pays, US Chief of Staff, as saying that Iraqis want American and foreign troops to quit Iraq as soon as possible.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"A Message from President Asad to his Sudanese counterpart Omar Hasan al-Bashir on current Arab developments and the forthcoming Arab summit in Khartoum. Deputy Foreign Minister Walid al-Mu'allem discusses in Sudan the importance of boosting Arab solidarity within the framework of existing Arab institutions" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 12/27)
"Lebanese parities reiterate rejection of internationalizing and isolating Lebanon from Syria. Lahoud underscores the importance of reconciliation and participation of all

parties in the Prime Ministry's meetings" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/27)

"Berri [Speaker of Lebanese parliament]: UNSC Resolution 1559 has ignored Israeli occupation and Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 12/27)
"Sharon goes to extremes in ignoring the Palestinian right of return to gain votes in elections. Sharon expands settlements around Jerusalem. The Palestinian Authority seeks Washington's help and warns against isolating Gaza" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/27)

"Iraqi calls for a national unity government. Demonstrations in Baghdad rejecting the election results. Three US marines killed in Baghdad. Ukrainian president contemplates pulling his troops from Iraq" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/27)

"General Pays [US Chief of Staff]: Iraqis want us to quit as soon as possible" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 12/27)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"How 2006 Becomes a Really New Year"

Dr. Khalaf al-Jarad, chief editor of government-owned Tishreen, said (12/27): "Lebanon was hit by a serious political earthquake in February 2005 through the assassination of former Lebanese PM Rafiq al-Hariri and the subsequent developments.... The work of the International Investigation Commission into the Al-Hariri assassination was exploited to besiege Syria and torpedo its strong and natural fraternal relations with Lebanon...."

"On the domestic level 2006 might be a quality year if government performance is based on a critical review of our performance in 2005 and in all fields.... There must be clear programs with timetables and accountability within the comprehensive development and reform process in the country...."

"As the challenges that Syria faced in 2005 were absorbed, thanks to the spontaneous national cohesion and the will to confront foreign pressure, it is necessary to reactivate the elements of steadfastness and domestic dynamism which are based on socio-economic activity and a political culture based on dialogue and respect for opposing opinions under the roof of the homeland with all its sectors, groups, and individuals...."

"Not only for Syria, but for Protecting the Heart of Arabism"

Elias Murad, chief editor of government-owned Al-Ba'th, editorialized (12/27): "The Syrians, who hoisted Syrian flags and expressed their love for their country and their readiness to defend it against foreign threats, were doing so out of their belief that their country is targeted because of its pan-Arab positions and defense of Arab causes. In this sense, Syrians were engaged in a national Arab activity rather than in a narrow Syrian exercise."

"When Syrians express their readiness to make sacrifices for the sake of their country, they in fact make a loud public statement that they are ready to continue shouldering the national responsibility of protecting Arab territory, safeguarding Arab rights, and defending the just Arab cause...."

"Some Lebanese politicians and writers have been involved, knowingly or unknowingly, in an effort seeking to deepen the feelings of hostility and division between Syria and Lebanon.... Syria will always stick to its pan-Arab principles and renounce regionalism...."

"God to Bush: Get out of Iraq"

Abd-al-Fattah al-Awad, chief editor of government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (12/26): "A series of American officials made statements confessing that mistakes were made concerning the Iraq war.... Withdrawal from Iraq has effectively begun with the announcement that the number of American troops there

will be reduced....

"God, who told Bush to go to Iraq to spread democracy, will soon tell him: Bush, this is enough. You made many mistakes and you have to sit on the confession chair and say: Sorry, Iraqis. I made a small mistake: instead of spreading democracy I spread misery and other things....

"Syria, in its positions, looks at the essence of things, not at the surface. It always proves to be right and wise.... It would be wrong to believe that the US confessions about the mistakes that were committed against Syria will come in one go, but many voices have begun to realize that this country is on the right track...."

"Harvest of the Policy of Illusions"

Muhammad Khair al-Jamali, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (12/27): "Why 2005 was a bad year for President Bush. US policy has failed at home and abroad, especially in Iraq, and the Middle East in general.

"The United State failed to win international support for its policies.... The world has become less safe after the invasion of Iraq.

"Scandals of the American secret prisons in Europe, the big human losses in Iraq, and the tendency to reduce freedoms at home... all this made the American people wake up to see the tragic situation brought about by neoconservative policies, which surpassed the consequences of the Vietnam war....

"We hope that Bush will learn the lessons from his wrong policy and will pursue a balanced policy based on dialogue

and respect for the interests of the world...."

Johnson-Casares